Adm. George Burkley Dies at 88; Was Doctor for Three Presidents

By ALFONZO A. NARVAEZ

Vice Adm. George G. Burkley, retired, a doctor to three Presidents, died Wednesday at Nazareth House, a nursing home in Los Angeles. He was 88 years old and lived in Los Angeles.

He died of pneumonia, said his granddaughter, Rita Dunlea of Los Angeles.

Admiral Burkley, who specialized in internal medicine and cardiology, served as the personal doctor to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson and was the doctor in charge at the Navy-operated Presidential retreat at Camp David. Md., when President Dwight D. Eisenhower was there. He also accompanied President Eisenhower on an 11-nation tour of the Far East in 1959.

At Assassination in Dallas

He joined the White House medical staff in 1961 as an assistant to Dr. Janet G. Travell, the White House physician. In August 1961 he was promoted from captain to rear admiral and shortly afterward began accompanying President Kennedy on all his trips. In July 1963, after publication of the Government Organization Manual listing his title as White House Physician, it was confirmed that he had been named as President Kennedy's personal doctor and that Dr. Travell had stepped down.

On Nov, 22, 1963, Admiral Burkley was in the Presidential motorcade in Dallas, riding behind the President's limousine, when President Kennedy was fatally shot. When the admiral arrived at Parkland Hospital the President was undergoing emergency treatment and he was unable to assist.

After Mr. Johnson was sworn in as President, Admiral Burkley was appointed his personal doctor. He was promoted to vice admiral in 1965 and helped nurse the President though colds and several surgeries, including a highly secret operation for cancer in 1967.

It was not until 1977, after Admiral Burkley had denied published reports of the operation, that a Navy spokesman confirmed that President Johnson had undergone surgery for skin cancer on the left ankle. The admiral retired in January 1969, at the end of the Johnson Administration.

A graduate of the University of Pittsburgh Medical School, he served as a Navy lieutenant commander in the South Pacific in World War II and was later assigned to naval hospitals before becoming head of the Naval Dispensary in Washington in 1957.

He is survived by two daughters, Isabel Starling of Elkview, W. Va., and Nancy Denlea of Los Angeles; two sons, George of Volcano, Hawaii, and Richard of Boulder, Colo; a sister, Teresa Wunderlich of Miami; 19 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Associated Press, 1965

Vice Adm. George G. Burkley